



Send News

Blogs

AV Media

Subscribe

Calendar

Homes

Jobs

Cars

News Search

Web Search

Classified Search

Advertising

Home Delivery

Reader Services

Traffic

Stocks

Weather

Home

News

Sports

Business

Opinion

Entertainment

Features

Columnists

Community

Subscribe

Previous Issues

Letters

Obituaries

Place An Ad

Send Feedback

Print Page

Wednesday, April 23, 2008

Last modified Thursday, April 10, 2008 1:07 PM PDT

SAN MARCOS: Manufactured home park's ruling may allow more middle-class homeowners to go solar

By DAN SIMMONS - Staff Writer

SAN MARCOS ---- A decision last month by Madrid Manor manufactured-home park to allow solar-powered homes could entice budget-conscious owners of manufactured home statewide to 'go solar' as a way to save money on utilities, said North County solar-energy consultant Stuart Rodman.

The 330-unit park's homeowners association voted unanimously to allow residents to install homes manufactured to draw most of their energy from the sun and to qualify for government subsidies for solar-power users.

Madrid Manor is one of the first manufactured-home parks in the state to allow solar-powered homes, according to local and state officials. The option could have particular appeal to seniors, who predominate in the parks, Rodman said.

"The goal is not to have an electrical bill," he said.

There are 4,734 manufactured home parks in the state with nearly 400,000 spaces, according to Sheila Dey, executive director of the Western Manufactured Housing Communities Association in Sacramento.

She said she is not aware of any other parks that had officially given the nod for residents to go solar, but said she wasn't surprised by the decision at Madrid Manor. Jess Maxey, president of a statewide consortium of manufactured-home builders, said he knows of just two builders making solar-equipped homes in the factory, but expects more to follow.

"I think it's a step in the right direction," he said. "There is a strong movement among manufacturers to produce more and more energy-efficient homes."

Buying the homes equipped for solar power will add an extra \$8,000 to \$22,000 to the price of a new manufactured home, Rodman said. However, the extra up-front expense will be erased in about seven years thanks to energy savings and by subsidies provided through the California Solar Initiative, he said.

Madrid Manor, at 1401 El Norte Parkway, already has one house manufactured for solar-energy use in place, although no one has bought it yet, said homeowners' association president Ken Gearhart.

In addition to cutting or eliminating electricity bills, residents with solar-powered homes could also save from the energy they produce, Rodman said. That system is known as "net metering."

When they produce more energy than they use thanks to the sun, their meter runs in reverse, yielding energy savings.

Most manufactured home parks in California, Rodman said, are "master metered," in which each homeowner is charged for energy use by the park's master account.

Under that system, residents with solar power electric generating systems "had no way to be sure that all the electricity produced by their home would be credited against their electrical bills," Rodman said.

Rodman said he and his business partner, Mark Snyder of Mark Snyder Electric Co. of Poway, pitched the idea of solar-powered manufactured homes to Hallmark Southwest Corporation of Loma Linda.

Hallmark Southwest made the first solar-equipped manufactured home and will make more as demand increases, Rodman said.

Woodland Homes of Escondido is licensed to sell the homes, Rodman said.

Snyder has been in the solar-power industry for about three decades and has extensive experience building zero-energy homes and retrofitting others, Rodman said.

However, the customers have tended to be wealthier with plenty of disposable income, Rodman said. The new opportunities in manufactured homes are different.

"You're speaking to a sector of the market that is more cost-conscious," he said. "Solar electric power is poised to change its image as being only affordable for the wealthy."

Contact staff writer Dan Simmons at (760) 740-5426 or dsimmons@nctimes.com.